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Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Two fires delay plans to update Arlington inn

BY JEANNE GRAHAM
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

ARLINGTON — Two fires in eight days, one of them arson, have delayed plans to renovate the aging Flagship Inn's once-elegant Crystal Palace Ballroom, the owners of the inn said.

Purchased in 1993 by a group led by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Indian-born founder of transcendental meditation, the Crystal Palace ballroom was home for many years of the annual Cinderella Ball, a fund-raiser for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Arlington. It also hosted Fielder Museum fund-raisers, wedding receptions, cotillion parties, professional dance shows and victory parties on election nights.

The World Plan Executive Council bought Flagship Inn in September 1993 with plans to restore the facility as a hotel and university for transcendental meditation studies. The Crystal Palace was to be renovated as a rental ballroom next year until arson damaged the ballroom this month. Then, on Sunday, a four-alarm blaze heavily damaged several rooms of a 24-unit building.

"I remember the first time I saw the Crystal Palace ballroom," said Gwen Bodenhamer, 63, an Arlington resident for the past 44 years. "We held the first dance of the Bailando Dance Club there in 1967. It was very formal. We all wore long gloves and evening gowns. It was a nostalgic-looking place with huge crystal chandeliers and velvet curtains."

A one-alarm blaze Sept. 16 caused smoke and heat damage to the ballroom's interior, according to the Arlington Fire Department. No arrests have been made, although officials said they are pursuing some leads.

Fire investigators and Flagship owners disagreed about the extent of damage. Owners estimated the damage at $450,000, including contents, but Stephen Lea, the Fire Department's fire prevention supervisor, put the damage at $50,500.

The second fire, the result of an electrical short in the attic, has taken 24 rooms off the market, said hotel manager, Vickie Richards. Richards said insurance adjusters have not completed their reports but that damage will be somewhere between $100,000 and $200,000. The Fire Department estimated the damage at $150,000 for the structure and $10,000 for contents, Lea said.

The 263-room hotel, called the Inn at Six Flags when it was built in 1962, has suffered decreasing revenues since 1989.

Two Fires Delay Plans To Update Arlington Inn

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